

labor leaders like Billy Lee, in the pursuit of defending the interests of working Americans. In my 20 years as an elected official—I have never voted against the working men and women in this room. I stand as a proud friend of labor and always will be.

In Billy Lee's time as International Association of Machinists President, he served among those brave leaders on the front lines of the fight to achieve greater worker compensation, improved employee health benefits, social security and pension benefits, and better worker rights. The International Association of Machinists, a large and diverse organization, represents 730,000 members across North America. The Northeast Florida branch, with dedicated Members like Billy, fights to carry out the IAM's union's righteous cause, to stand up against big business and fight to protect the workers of America.

Billy was survived by his wife Joyce, his son Michael Ray Lee, daughter Marilyn Lee, and eight grandchildren. A family oriented man, Billy enjoyed fishing, gardening and particularly loved cookouts. Billy Lee was loved and well respected by everyone that knew him. He will be dearly missed by his family, the community, and by those who fought alongside him in the labor movement.

#### FOREST RESTORATION AND FIRE RISK REDUCTION ACT

#### HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 27, 2003

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Forest Restoration and Fire Risk Reduction Act, a bill based upon the collaboration with my colleague and cousin, Representative MARK UDALL of Colorado.

In the 134 million-acre interior West, scientific assessments indicate that in pre-industrial times, 50 to 80 million acres burned per year. In the 1900's, however, fire suppression became federal policy. A century of fire suppression, excessive logging and overgrazing of livestock has led, in many areas, to overstocked forests of second-growth trees. These forests are extremely susceptible to the damaging effects of high-intensity fire.

In terms of resource damage, catastrophic wildfire affects our forest's ecosystems by destroying critical habitat, eroding soil, changing air temperature, moisture content and productivity, while at the same time, facilitating the spread of invasive weeds and non-native plants, and generating air pollution. This matter is complicated further by rising fiscal costs that force the increased population and development of "wildland/urban" interface areas. In recent years, the Forest Service generally has expended \$500–600 million annually in fire preparedness, suppression, and rehabilitation. Within the past last three years, however, over a billion dollars have been spent.

Inseparably related to current forest management practices is the issue of pervasive drought. As we all know, our nation has been suffering from severe drought conditions for several years now, and so far this year proves to be no different. Rain and snowfall in New Mexico and many of our western states is to date far below averages. As a result of the continuing drought in the west, we have also

experienced some of the worst wildfire seasons in modern history. The relatively recent Cerro Grande fire in New Mexico, the Hayman fire in Colorado, and the Rodeo-Chediski fires in Arizona illustrate the severity of the situation. These fires were catastrophic in proportion and inflicted grave environmental, social, and economic impacts on the affected local communities. Consequently, these, and other areas affected by the devastating affects of raging wildfires, face years of restorative efforts and depend upon the development and implementation of a viable fire hazard mitigation program on National Forest System lands to avert such disasters in the future.

In response to these concerns and those I heard from constituents, I have worked closely with Representative MARK UDALL to devise a bill that takes these issues to task. Our "Forest Restoration and Fire Risk Reduction Act" refocuses the implementation of the National Fire Plan (NFP) to areas designated as "wildland/urban interface," the critical zones that are of the highest risk to people, property and water supplies, by redirecting NFP funding and hazardous fuels reduction projects through state selection panels.

A general consensus exists today that thinning our forests—by controlled burns or mechanical means—will lessen the likelihood of unusually severe fires. However, the Bush Administration contends that to facilitate such thinning projects, the environmental laws and procedures for public comment and participation are obstacles that must be removed. I believe that this contention is incomprehensible and conceptually flawed.

The exemption of fire-risk reduction projects from environmental review, public comments and administrative appeals, circumvents established policy of public participation, an important aspect of our democratic process for making decisions affecting public lands. Furthermore, excluding public comment would not assist in developing sound forest management. The bill we are introducing today maintains these sound principles of law and public policy, and makes some relatively innocuous procedural concessions that can expedite the process of resolving appeals.

I anticipate that collaboration between state and federal land managers, and local and tribal communities in both decision and implementation activities may contribute to the development of cost-effective restoration activities, empower diverse organizations to implement activities that value local and traditional knowledge, build ownership and civic pride, and ensure healthy, diverse, and productive forests and watersheds. Such collaboration would result in the efficient restoration of areas distressed by wildfires and help protect our homeowners and businesses from future losses.

I believe, as all of us from the western United States would likely agree, that it is much better to support proactive preventative maintenance programs to reduce fire risks than it is to wait to do something once a fire occurs. We need legislation that will reduce the potential for catastrophic fires and protect our communities, and aid in the restoration of lands that may meet the same unfortunate fate as did those in the Cerro Grande blaze. The "Forest Restoration and Fire Risk Reduction Act" will accomplish these common goals.

A TRIBUTE TO THE LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF LOUIS L. RAMSAY, JR.

#### HON. MIKE ROSS

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 27, 2003

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a distinguished constituent and leader in my district, whose professional and civic contributions have helped to shape the business climate in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and throughout the state.

Louis Ramsay, Jr. was born in 1918 in Fordyce, Arkansas, in rural Dallas County. He grew up attending the Fordyce public schools, and went on to earn pre-law and law degrees from the University of Arkansas. After law school, he joined the Law Firm of Coleman and Gantt, where he became a Partner in 1948. For the past 54 years he has been with the firm now known as Ramsay, Bridgeforth, Harrelson & Starling, where he continues to serve as "Of Counsel." He was elected President of Simmons First National Bank in 1970 and served as Chairman and CEO from 1973–1983. He currently serves as Chairman of the Executive Committee of Simmons First National Corporation. He is the only person in the state's history to have served as President of the Arkansas Bar Association and the Arkansas Bankers Association.

Louis Ramsay was recently honored with an induction into the Arkansas Business Hall of Fame, and I cannot think of a more worthy businessman for this distinction. Ramsay has made it a personal mission to use his standing in the business community to better the entire community. He has worked to improve the state's higher education system through service to the University of Arkansas's campuses, including Pine Bluff. He has served as President of the Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce, the Pine Bluff Rotary Club, Fifty for the Future of Pine Bluff, and countless other organizations aimed at improving the quality of life in the area.

If we can learn one lesson from the exemplary life and career of Louis Ramsay, it is the value of service. He has served the community of Pine Bluff and the state of Arkansas, he has served our country with distinction in World War II as a pilot in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and he has served his family and his neighbors as well. I thank Mr. Ramsay for his commitment to improving our state, and I congratulate him on this prestigious distinction.

#### A SALUTE TO THE GREAT LAKES NAVY BANDSMEN

#### HON. BOBBY L. RUSH

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 27, 2003

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, I come before the House Chamber this evening pleased and honored to salute the over five thousand African American musicians who, during World War II, played in the band of the Great Lakes Naval Base in Illinois. These highly talented musicians played an important part in our nation's history and this weekend, many of them